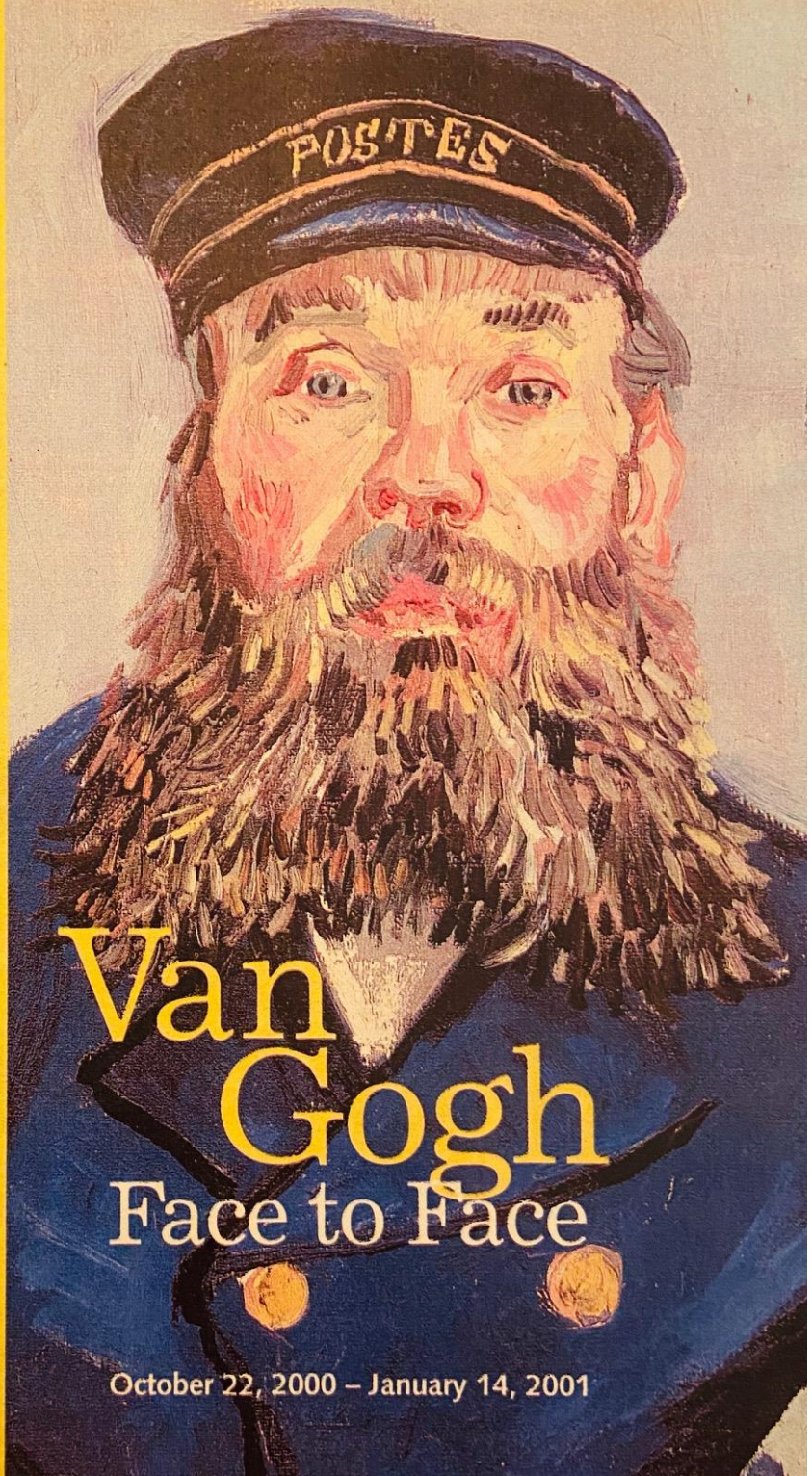


As featured inside Inquirer Magazine

Philadelphia Museum of Art



Van Gogh  
Face to Face

October 22, 2000 – January 14, 2001

# Director's Statement

Vincent van Gogh is among the most famous painters in the history of western art. More than a century after his death, the painter's name is recognized across the world. Of interest not only to specialists, but also to the widest imaginable audiences, he is a phenomenon that has exceeded the bounds of art history, and taken on nearly cosmic proportions.

Van Gogh's popularity rests in the extraordinary power of his images. His paintings and drawings have retained an ability to renew themselves, looking fresh for each generation of admirers. Discover this for

yourself when you visit *Van Gogh: Face to Face*, on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art from October 22, 2000, to January 14, 2001.

Despite the impressive range of investigation into van Gogh's life and work, there had never been a major museum exhibition devoted exclusively to his portraits—the aspect of his work that van Gogh himself held most dear. It is, therefore, with particular pride and delight that the Philadelphia Museum of Art has joined with The Detroit Institute of Arts and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, to



*Anne d'Harnoncourt  
The George D. Widener Director  
and Chief Executive Officer,  
Philadelphia Museum of Art*

present this exhibition assembled from public and private collections around the world.

It is deeply thrilling to find ourselves—and to be able to place our audiences—face to face with van Gogh's challenging and profoundly moving portraits.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Anne d'Harnoncourt". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in the same style as the text on the page.

# Portrait of the Artist

## The Life of Vincent van Gogh

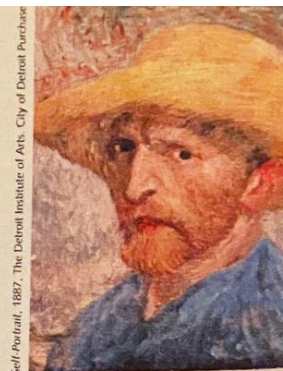
Vincent van Gogh spent only the last ten years of his life as an artist, yet in that short time he transformed the way we look at the world. Born in 1853, the son of a Dutch Reformed pastor, the young van Gogh worked in art galleries in The Hague, London, and Paris, before beginning theological studies in Amsterdam and serving as an evangelist to struggling miners in the Borinage coal-mining region of Belgium from 1879 to 1880. There, after sketching the miners at work, van Gogh decided to abandon his

religious vocation and devote himself to art.

At the end of 1881, he moved back to The Hague, turning for instruction to his cousin by marriage, Anton Mauve, who was chief among the painters of the "Hague School" (see page VG22). Vincent's brother Theo, a successful art dealer in Paris, provided him with a monthly stipend. During these formative years as a brooding artist, most of his works were drawings—dark, and very rough.

In 1886 he moved to Paris, where

his art underwent a tremendous transformation. He met the Impressionist artists, including Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, as well as the Post-Impressionist Paul Gauguin, and began to assimilate and reinterpret their radical approaches—his palette became bold and pulsed with astonishing color. By 1888, when the pace of Parisian life took its toll on van Gogh both mentally and physically, he moved to Arles in the south of France, and entered the most intense and prolific moment in his career. It was also in Arles that he suffered a violent breakdown, and in 1889 committed himself to an asylum in nearby St.-Rémy. He ended his life in July 1890 in Auvers, a town just northwest of Paris. In the last few months of his life, van Gogh produced a group of joyous portraits.




Self-Portrait, 1887, The Detroit Institute of Arts, City of Detroit Purchase



Head of a Young Man, 1884-85, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation), Amsterdam

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## Coming Face to Face with Van Gogh

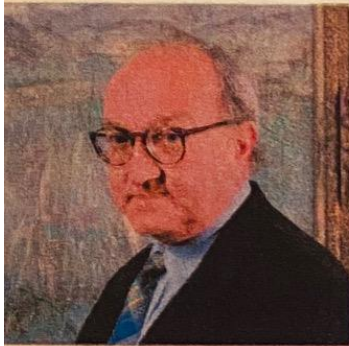
### An Exhibition Overview

Just months before his suicide in 1890, Vincent van Gogh wrote, "What fascinates me much, much more than does anything else in my métier is the portrait, the modern portrait... I should like to do portraits which will appear as revelations to people in 100 years time." Featuring more than 70 paintings and drawings—many of which have never been on view in the United States—*Van Gogh: Face to Face* looks at the artist's passionate commitment to portraiture. Organized chronologically, the exhibition explores the artist's evolving fascination not only with the human image, but with humanity itself, and charts the extraordinary development of his vision.



Portrait of the Scottish Art Dealer Alexander Reid, 1887, Glasgow Museums: Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Purchased in 1974 with the aid of a special Government grant, the National Art-Collections Fund, an anonymous donor and public subscription

# Interview with Curator Joe Rishel



Joseph J. Rishel,  
The Gisela and Dennis Alter Senior  
Curator of European Painting  
before 1900, Philadelphia Museum  
of Art, was one of the three  
principal organizers of  
Van Gogh: Face to Face.

## Q: Why did you choose to explore van Gogh's portraits?

A: It had never really been done before, which was amazing, since the modern portrait begins with van Gogh—we knew we were going to a great well of inspiration! It was immensely fascinating and led to an exhibition that is both surprising and revelatory. Now, we can really see—from picture to picture—how van Gogh achieved his stated goal: “to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize.”

## Q: How long have you been working on the exhibition?

A: It all began in 1992 with a picture of Joseph Roulin, the artist's favorite sitter, which The Detroit

Institute of Arts [DIA] had just acquired. George Keyes of the DIA began to think about an exhibition of van Gogh's portraits of the Roulin family, and approached the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. We discussed it at length, and when Anne [d'Harnoncourt, Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art] suggested we widen the concept, we took up the gauntlet, because it could be both groundbreaking and exciting for our audiences.

## Q: What inspired the three museums to join as partners in this project?

A: Strength in numbers! In addition to Joseph Roulin, Detroit owns a wonderful self-portrait. Boston owns two portraits by van Gogh, including his magisterial *Postman, Joseph Roulin* (1888) seated at a table, and the enigmatic *La Berceuse*, showing Madame Augustine Roulin rocking a cradle (1889).

We have two marvelous ones as well: *Madame Roulin and Her Baby* (1888), and *Camille Roulin* (1888).

## Q: What's special about *Van Gogh: Face to Face*?

A: It contains so many surprises. Not only the brightly colored images that are so familiar, but also darker, penetrating works from the artist's early career that are rarely seen outside his native Netherlands, and are key to understanding his love of Rembrandt. Viewing them all together is both an intimate and dramatic experience that tells you a lot about van Gogh the man, and traces the development of his revolutionary genius.

# Paths of Influence

Artists in the Museum Who Inspired Van Gogh

Van Gogh found inspiration in museums, galleries, and the studios of fellow artists. After seeing an exhibition at the Louvre of self-portraits by Rembrandt, David, Courbet, Delacroix, and others, he depicted himself as an artist.



Anton Mauve, *The Return of the Flock*, c. 1886-87, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The George W. Elkins Collection

In the Philadelphia Museum of Art, you can see work by the artists van Gogh turned to for direction and dialogue.

Rembrandt (1606-1669) often painted figures in exotic costumes, as in *Bust of a Man in Gorget and Cap* (about 1626-27; Gallery 262). Like Rembrandt, van Gogh's images of fishermen, in which old pensioners donned hats as props, allowed the young painter to mingle fantasy and reality.

In Gallery 155, you can see *The Return of the Flock* by Anton Mauve. A Hague School-artist much admired by van Gogh, Mauve created a rural scene that relates directly to van Gogh's eloquent drawings and paintings of Dutch peasants and fishermen.

# In Van Gogh's Wake

His Influence on Modern and Contemporary Artists

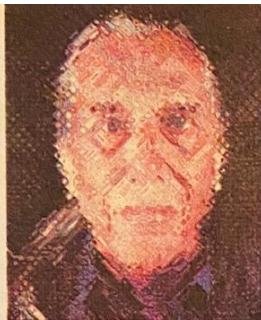
*Van Gogh: Face to Face* finds a wonderful context in the superb collections of 19th- and 20th-century art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Not only are great examples of van Gogh's landscape and still-life painting on view in the Museum's galleries—including *Rain* and the only version of his spectacular *Sunflowers* in North America (galleries 157 and 166 respectively)—but the collections are rich in the art of his Impressionist and Post-Impressionist contemporaries such as Cézanne, Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec and van Gogh's colleague Gauguin.

Van Gogh's legacy is evident in many works found in the Museum's newly renovated and reinstalled Galleries of Modern and Contemporary Art. Pablo Picasso paid homage to van Gogh's seminal influence when he said,

"Painting isn't a question of sensibility; it's a matter of seizing the power, taking over from nature, not expecting her to supply you with information and good advice...Van Gogh was the first one to find the key to that tension."

In a *Self-Portrait of 1906* (Gallery 167), Picasso presents himself as a proud and determined painter holding a palette in one hand, while the clenched fist of his other hand suggests his coiled, creative energy.

Chuck Close, *Paul*, 1994, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with funds (by exchange) from the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Cummins Cabrenwood, the Edith H. Bell Fund, and with funds contributed by the Committee on Twentieth-Century Art



Perhaps, when painting this image, Picasso was thinking about van Gogh's self-portraits, which also addressed the challenges and complexities of life as an artist.

Chuck Close, among the most acclaimed makers of portraits working today, first saw van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with a Felt Hat* (1887; see page V24) in 1959, when he was 19 years old. He says of it, "The thing which thrilled me then, and still has urgency for me today, is the fact that

Willem de Kooning, *Seated Woman*, c. 1940, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Albert M. Greenfield and Elizabeth M. Greenfield Collection



the painting is very much a painting, very much about marks, very much about the distribution of color on a flat surface as well as the image which it ultimately warps into...One of the wonderful things about being a painter is that it is very much like being a magician. You conjure up illusions." Close's portrait of the late Paul Cadmus (Gallery 176) owes something to the extraordinarily experimental color pioneered by van Gogh, as does his portrait of Lucas Samaras,

Pablo Picasso, *Self-Portrait*, 1906, Philadelphia Museum of Art, A.E. Gallatin Collection



which is on loan to *Van Gogh: Face to Face* from a private collection.

In *Modern and Contemporary* Gallery 180, *Seated Woman* (circa 1940) by the Dutch-American painter Willem de Kooning is a spectacularly energized example of Abstract Expressionism, a movement that hearkened to van Gogh's emotionally charged precedent.

# People and Places

## Van Gogh's Travels

Vincent van Gogh traveled restlessly throughout his career. During a brief stay in Antwerp, van Gogh wrote, "I feel a certain power within me, because wherever I may be, I shall always have an aim—painting people as I see and know them." Whether in The Hague, Drenthe, and Nuenen, or Paris, Arles, St.-Rémy, and Auvers, he found inspiration in the local people and landscape.

### The Hague, 1882-1883

Van Gogh moved to The Hague, The Netherlands' capital city and then its most dynamic artistic center, in 1882. As he could not afford to hire professional models, he studied aged men known as "old pensioners" or "orphan men," and other poor residents of the city.

While living in The Hague, van

Gogh became friendly with Clasina Hoornik, known as Sien, a poor seamstress. Sien and her children moved in with the artist and van Gogh began drawing her, her mother, her younger sister, and her children. These moving works, such as *Sien Seated, Sewing* (right), capture the physical and emotional poverty of the sitters.



Sien Seated, Sewing, 1883, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

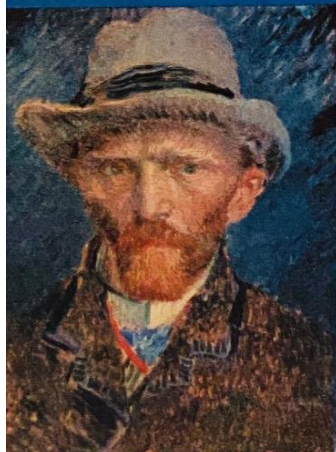


### Paris, 1886-1888

Exposure to Parisian avant-garde artists such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Gauguin, and Georges Seurat, changed van Gogh's attitude toward color. Exhibition co-organizer George T.M. Shackelford, of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, explains, "During his two-year residence in Paris, van Gogh transformed himself and his art, emerging from the self-imposed gloom of his Netherlandish manner into the full sunlight of his modern French style." Van Gogh's vibrant new energy is captured in *Self-Portrait*, 1887 (below), which shimmers with the small, dotted (Pointillist) brushstrokes employed by his contemporaries Seurat and Paul Signac.

## Van Gogh's Self-Portraits

Van Gogh, like Rembrandt before him, was often his own best subject. Presented in *Van Gogh: Face to Face* are five of the 24 self-portraits painted during his two-year stay in Paris.

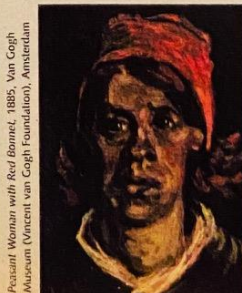


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In them, van Gogh varies his clothing—from the suit and bowler hat of an urban sophisticate (illustrated here) to the smock and straw hat of an outdoor painter (right)—and experiments with Impressionist and Pointillist painting techniques. In his Paris self-portraits, we see van Gogh trying on fashions, in life and art.

### Nuenen, 1883-1885

In Nuenen, van Gogh committed himself to the belief that peasants working the land were the true subjects of modern art. Van Gogh produced many works on this theme, including *Peasant Woman with Red Bonnet*, 1885, (below). Such studies led to van Gogh's first masterpiece, *The Potato Eaters* (1885; on view in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam). Negative criticism of the painting spurred van Gogh's decision to leave his native country, permanently.



Peasant Woman with Red Bonnet, 1885, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation), Amsterdam



Self-Portrait, 1887, The Detroit Institute of Arts, City of Detroit Purchase

### Arles, 1888-1889

The excitement and intensity of the Parisian art scene proved too much for van Gogh. He found tranquility in the French Provençal town of Arles, and was inspired by the region's strong light and clear skies. Van Gogh wrote, "What pleases me very much is the gaily multicolored clothes, the women and girls dressed in cheap simple material, but with green, red, pink, Havanna-yellow, violet or blue stripes, or dots of the same colors... A vigorous sun, like sulfur, shining on it all, the great blue sky—sometimes it is as enormously gay as Holland is gloomy." Of *The Zouave*—a French-Algerian infantryman—van Gogh noted, "That bronzed, feline head of his with the reddish cap, against a green door and the orange bricks of a wall...It's a savage combination of tones, not easy to manage."

In Arles, van Gogh was befriended by the postman Joseph Roulin and his wife, Augustine. The artist painted them and their three children more frequently than any sitters other than himself: "If I manage to do this whole family... I shall have done something to my liking and something individual."

Van Gogh also stayed in contact with the painter Paul Gauguin, who eventually traveled to Arles. After a productive two-month period during which the artists lived and worked together, their relationship grew strained, and culminated in a violent argument on December 23. That night, van Gogh mutilated his left ear and was hospitalized. During his remaining months in Arles, he was plagued by recurring attacks of mental and physical illness.



The Postman Joseph Roulin, 1888, The Detroit Institute of Arts



The Gardener, 1889, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome

### St.-Rémy, 1889

Van Gogh committed himself to an asylum in nearby St.-Rémy in May 1889. He experienced additional seizures, but was able to paint during intervals of better health. Van Gogh was just emerging from an extended confinement indoors when he painted *The Gardener* (1889)—believed to be the asylum's groundskeeper—in harmony with his sunny and well-cultivated field.



Portrait of Adeline Ravoux, 1890, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Request of Leonard C. Hanna, Jr.

### Auvers, 1890

As he recovered, Van Gogh's desire to be closer to Theo and his family, and to the artistic stimulus of Paris, spurred him to leave St.-Rémy. He moved to Auvers, where he was under the care of Dr. Gachet, an amateur artist and serious collector of modern art who admired van Gogh's paintings.

In Auvers, he explored the countryside and painted the people, including *Adeline Ravoux*, the daughter of his innkeeper. Her 1890 portrait captures the young woman's soulful gaze.

## Panoramas and Portraits

Rural landscape offered van Gogh solace and well-being. Mr. Keyes of Detroit explains, "His reverence for the countryside still unaffected by modern industrial society caused van Gogh to see the peasant working the land as the embodiment of the 'true human condition.' He reinforced his belief in the value of the unchanging world of nature by harking back to the Dutch old masters, whose landscapes were proof that this same landscape had existed for centuries."



Panorama, 1889, Musée d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

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